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C O N F I D E N T I A L TASHKENT 000677

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [UZ](#)
SUBJECT: UZBEK GOVERNMENT TO RE-REGISTER JEWISH-AMERICAN NGO

REF: A. TASHKENT 517
[1](#)B. TASHKENT 620

Classified By: POLOFF R. FITZMAURICE FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: On June 12, regional coordinators of the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), a Jewish-American humanitarian organization, reported being told by a Ministry of Justice official that their organization will soon be re-registered, pending the resolution of a minor legal issue. The regional coordinators said that they would resolve the legal issue shortly, and they fully expected JDC to be re-registered. In April, at roughly the same time the Justice Ministry refused to renew the accreditation of an AmCit Rabbi (who was later deported), a Ministry of Justice official publicly accused JDC of violating Uzbek law and threatened to deregister the organization. Separately, the JDC coordinators reported that their problems with Uzbekistan's opaque banking system had lessened, though it was still interrupting their distribution of humanitarian aid, and that their organization helped open a new Jewish history museum in Samarkand. While it is disappointing that the government deported the AmCit Rabbi, the news that JDC will be re-registered is most welcome. It also lends credence to the view that the government's actions against the Rabbi were motivated by corruption rather than anti-Semitism. End summary.

JDC TO BE REREGISTERED, PENDING RESOLUTION OF LEGAL ISSUE

[1](#)2. (C) On June 12, poloff met with Stanley Abromovitch and Max Wiesel, regional coordinators of the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), a Jewish-American humanitarian organization which has operated an office in Tashkent for many years. In an April 2 Interfax article, the Ministry of Justice Department for Public Associations and Religious Organizations Head Jalol Abdusattarov had been quoted as stating that a probe into the operations of JDC's Tashkent office had "revealed a number of major violations of law" which were enough to suspend the organization's operations in

Uzbekistan (ref A). However, the JDC coordinators reported having a "very positive" meeting on June 11 with the Justice Ministry, at which they were told that JDC would be re-registered pending the resolution of a minor legal issue, namely transferring the power of attorney of JDC's New York governing board from Wiesel, a citizen of Israel, to JDC's Tashkent office director, Boris Nedosekov, a citizen of Uzbekistan. Abromovitch and Wiesel said the power of attorney would be transferred soon, and they fully expected that JDC would be re-registered.

NEW BLOOD AT THE JUSTICE MINISTRY?

¶3. (C) The JDC coordinators did not meet with Abdusattarov at the Justice Ministry, but with a younger official who had recently been promoted into a position dealing with foreign NGOs. They reported that the new official appeared friendly and open-minded, in stark contrast to Abdusattarov, whom several NGOs and religious organizations reported was often confrontational and rude to them in meetings (Comment: We are not able to confirm that Abdusattarov has been replaced with the younger official, but this is an intriguing possibility. If true, his removal is good news for foreign NGOs. However, the director of the Open Dialogue Project in Tashkent, who deals frequently with the Ministry of Justice, doubted the possibility that Abdusattarov was removed from his position. End comment.)

"PERMANENT" REGISTRATIONS PERIODIC HEADACHE FOR JDC

¶4. (C) Abromovitch noted with frustration that JDC has been granted several "permanent registrations" in the past, but that the organization was forced to re-register every time the Uzbek government passed a new law or regulation affecting foreign NGOs. Abromovitch observed that the re-registration process in Uzbekistan was often frustrating, slow, and expensive. While he had no doubts that JDC would be re-registered this time, he also did not doubt that JDC would be forced to re-register yet again once the government alters its laws or regulations.

¶5. (C) Abromovitch reported that a branch organization of JDC, "Hesed" ("kindness" in Hebrew), remains unregistered in Uzbekistan despite several attempts to register the organization over the years. Hesed provides welfare assistance to needy Jewish residents in the country. Although Hesed remains unregistered, Abromovitch said that its unofficial status has largely not impacted its activities in Uzbekistan.

BANKING SITUATION IMPROVING, BUT STILL DELAYING AID

¶6. (C) Wiesel reported that JDC's difficulties with Uzbekistan's banking system had improved somewhat recently. In December 2007, the Director of Uzbekistan's Central Bank had issued an internal document requiring that organizations deposit their foreign grant monies in one of two banks (the National Bank of Uzbekistan and Asaka Bank). In order to withdraw those funds for programmatic purposes, NGOs needed to seek approval from a special commission at the banks. Wiesel noted that the bank's commission has so far eventually approved all of JDC's requests to withdraw funds. He said that the process now averaged about six weeks, as opposed to the two or more months JDC had to wait previously. However, Wiesel noted that the delay was still hampering their ability to distribute humanitarian assistance, which is mostly shared with needy members of Uzbekistan's Jewish community, but is also shared with non-Jews as well.

JDC HELPS OPEN NEW JEWISH MUSEUM IN SAMARKAND

¶7. (C) Abromovitch and Wiesel reported that they would be traveling to Samarkand on June 13 for the opening of a new museum on the city's Jewish community, which JDC supported.

Abromovitch said that the new "museum" would occupy two rooms of Samarkand's main history museum. He noted that city officials had assisted in the creation of the museum and would be present at its opening.

JDC CONSIDERING SENDING DELEGATION TO UZBEKISTAN

¶8. (C) Abromovitch reported that JDC's governing board in New York was considering sending a delegation to Uzbekistan to meet with government officials and others, including the American Embassy. He noted that JDC had recently sent a delegation to Turkmenistan in November 2007. Both Abromovitch and Wiesel are based in Israel, where they cover JDC's operations in Central Asia, the Caucasus, and southern Russia.

JDC'S COORDINATORS CONFIRM GUREVICH NOW IN ISRAEL

¶9. (C) Abromovitch and Wiesel were following the case of AmCit Rabbi David Gurevich, who was denied accreditation by the Justice Ministry in April (at roughly the same time that Abdusattarov had threatened to deregister JDC) and was later ordered to leave Uzbekistan on June 4 (ref B). They confirmed that Gurevich was now in Israel. They expressed surprise that Gurevich had somehow fallen afoul of the government, noting that he had been supported by Uzbek-Israeli diamond billionaire Lev Leviev (who is known to maintain good relations with the Karimov regime). According to them, Leviev had studied under Gurevich when he was growing up in Tashkent (Note: Gurevich had reported to us working in Uzbekistan before the fall of the Soviet Union. End note.) They noted rumors that Gurevich's troubles stemmed from an internal conflict within Uzbekistan's Jewish community, which might have involved corrupt mid-level Uzbek officials.

¶10. (C) Despite Rabbi Gurevich's departure, Abromovitch reported that his synagogue in Tashkent is still operating under the direction of another Rabbi from Israel, who previously served under Gurevich. In addition, the Lubavitch Movement's humanitarian organization, which Gurevich headed and which operates the only Jewish school in Uzbekistan, remains functioning.

COMMENT

¶11. (C) While it is unfortunate that the government deported AmCit Rabbi David Gurevich, the news that the Justice Ministry will re-register the Joint Distribution Committee is most welcome. The government's decision to re-register JDC, as well as its support for the opening of a new Jewish history museum in Samarkand, lends credence to the view that its previous actions against Rabbi Gurevich were not motivated by anti-Semitism, but rather by other factors, including a possible internal conflict within Uzbekistan's Jewish community, in which corrupt mid-level Uzbek officials (possibly including Abdusattarov) might have played a part. We will continue to urge the government to reconsider its decision to deport Gurevich.

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